

## Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

INFO WHITE HOUSE

S E C R E T STATE 067754 TOSEC 030011

NODIS

FOR UNDER SECRETARY HABIB; WH FOR DR. BREZEZINSKI

FOLLOWING REPEAT KINSHASA 2759 ACTION SECSTATE 26 MAR 77

QUOTE

S E C R E T KINSHASA 2759

NODIS

DEPT PLS PASS BRUSSELS FOR UNDER SECRETARY HABIB

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINS CG

SUBJ: SHABA INVASION: DECLINING PROSPECTS FOR MOBUTU'S POLITICAL  
SURVIVAL; RECOMMENDED US ACTION

SUMMARY: CURRENT INVASION OF SHABA HAS SERIOUSLY EXACERBATED POPULAR  
DISSATISFACTION WITH MOBUTU REGIME. OUR CURRENT ASSESSMENT IS THAT  
EVEN IF INVASION CAN BE CONTAINED QUICKLY, WHICH APPEARS DOUBTFUL,  
MOBUTU'S POSITION WILL HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY WEAKENED. IN VIEW OF THIS  
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NEGATIVE TREND, I RECOMMEND WE TAKE DISCREET STEPS NOW TO PRESERVE  
WIDESPREAD POSITIVE ATTITUDE IN ZAIRE TOWARD US BY STRESSING OUR  
SUPPORT FOR ZAIRE'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AS OPPOSED TO SUPPORT FOR  
MOBUTU REGIME PER SE. BELIEVE CAREFUL USE OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ALONG  
LINES SUGGESTED IN THIS MESSAGE WOULD BE BEST WAY TO UNDERTAKE THIS  
EFFORT. END SUMMARY.

1. ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING AND POTENTIALLY SERIOUS ASPECTS OF THE CURRENT CRISIS IN ZAIRE IS THE DEGREE TO WHICH OPPOSITION SENTIMENT TO MOBUTU HAS SURFACED ACROSS A BROAD SPECTRUM OF ZAIRIAN SOCIETY. AS REFLECTED IN OUR REPORTING FOR A LONG TIME, UNHAPPINESS WITH MOBUTU'S REGIME HAS GRADUALLY DEEPENED AS A RESULT OF A VARIETY OF GRIEVANCES: PROLONGED AND WORSENING ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OCCASSIONED IN PART BY DEPRESSED COPPER PRICES BUT ALSO IN LARGE MEASURE BY GROSS MISMANAGEMENT OF THE ECONOMY; WIDESPREAD AND OFTEN BLATANT CORRUPTION, STARTING AT THE TOP OF THE REGIME AND SEEPING FAR DOWN; CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION BY THE REGIME'S ELITE WHILE IT APPEALS FOR NATIONAL AUSTERITY; MISPLACED PRIORITIES IN ALLOCATING DEVELOPMENTAL RESOURCES, RESULTING IN MASSIVE DETERIORATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR; ILL-CONCEIVED POLICIES WITH RESPECT TO EDUCATION, THE CHURCH AND OTHER NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS; PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL ISOLATION OF THE LEADER FROM HIS FOLLOWERS.

2. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE MOBUTU REGIME IS NOT WITHOUT VERY SIGNIFICANT PLUSES. NOT THE LEAST OF THESE IS IMPORTANT FACT OF LIFE THAT MOBUTU, IN CONTRAST TO ANY OTHER LEADER SINCE INDEPENDENCE, HAS ACHIEVED THE SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE BY CREATING POLITICAL STABILITY NATIONWIDE AND MAINTAINING IT FOR ALMOSE A DOZEN YEARS. A DEFT POLITICIAN, HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO BALANCE RIVAL FORCES, WEATHER POLITICAL STORMS, AND PROJECT THE MUCH-NEEDED IMAGE OF A SINGLE NATION UNDER A SINGLE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND LEADER.

3. BUT BEGINNING WITH THE ONSET OF ZAPRE'S ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRISIS IN 1974, MOBUTU'S STAR HAS BEEN SLOWLY BUT PERSISTENTLY FALLING. WE HAVE WATCHED AND REPORTED THIS DECLINE, NOTING THAT WHILE POPULAR SUPPORT WAS WANING, MOBUTU'S CONTROL (NOTABLY OVER

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THE ARMY) NEVERTHELESS REMAINED INTACT. IT HAS BEEN AN INCREASINGLY VOLATILE SITUATION, BUT ONE WHICH COULD NEVERTHELESS PERSIST FOR A LONG TIME TO COME.

4. TODAY, THREE WEEKS INTO THE SHABA CRISIS, MY ASSESSMENT OF FACTORS AFFECTING MOBUTU'S POLITICAL VIABILITY IS DECIDEDLY MORE PESSIMISTIC. ALREADY THE INVASION HAS:

- SHOWN THE KEY BASE OF HIS POWER, THE ARMY, TO BE INEFFECTIVE;
- SHOWN THE WEAKNESS OF HIS POLITICAL ORGANIZATION WHICH IS INCAPABLE OF RALLYING THE POPULATION OR THE ELITE IN A MEANINGFUL SENSE;
- RALLIED A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE LUNDA POPULATION TO ITS CAUSE, THUS SETTING AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER DISAFFECTED PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AND SOCIETY;
- DEMONSTRATED THAT FEW OF MOBUTU'S MUCH-VAUNTED WESTERN FRIENDS ARE ABLE OR WILLING TO HELP HIM;
- DEMONSTRATED THAT HE HAS POWERFUL ENEMIES, BOTH FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC, WHO SEEM PREPARED TO UNSEAT HIM AND INSTALL ANOTHER REGIME;

--CREATED PROSPECTS FOR EXACERBATION OF THE ECONOMIC/FINANCIAL SITUATION TO THE POINT WHERE, EVEN IF THE INVASION IS CONTAINED, IT IS HIGHLY QUESTIONABLE THAT INTERNATIONAL CREDITORS AND INVESTORS WILL CONTINUE WILLINGLY TO MAKE THE EFFORT REQUIRED TO GET THE ECONOMY GOING AGAIN.

I DO NOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE SITUATION COULD IMPROVE, NECESSITATING A REVISION OF OUR CURRENT NEGATIVE ASSESSMENT. BUT AS OF TODAY I MUST CONCLUDE THAT THE INVASION HAS SERIOUSLY UNDERMINED THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE REGIME AS WE KNOW IT AND SIGNIFICANTLY ERODED THE ALREADY DWINDLING CREDIBILITY OF THE REGIME TO HANDLE THE NATION'S AFFAIRS.

5. I AM NOT PREDICTING MOBUTU'S IMMINENT DOWNFALL. IF THE FAZ CANNOT HOLD SHABA, OR CONTAIN THE INVASION -- OR COPE WITH PROLONGED INSURGENCY THERE -- THEN MOBUTU'S EARLY POLITICAL DEMISE WOULD SEEM LIKELY. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, THE SHABA PROBLEM CAN SOMEHOW

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BE RESOLVED QUICKLY AND SATISFACTORILY FROM THE STAND POINT OF ZAIRE'

TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, MOBUTU COULD RETAIN CONTROL FOR SOME TIME -- PERHAPS EVEN A LONG TIME -- TO COM. THERE IS NO WAY OF PREDICTING THIS, GIVEN ALL THE UNKNOWN OF THE CURRENT SITUATION. NOR CAN WE FORETELL EXACTLY HOW MOBUTU'S DEMISE MIGHT HAPPEN OR WHAT FORCES MIGHT RISE TO TAKE HIS PLACE. BUT WHAT IS APPARENT, NOW MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, IS THE RAPIDLY INCREASING DISSATISFACTION WITH HIS REGIME. AND IT IS THE BELIEF THAT THIS DISSATISFACTION AND UNPOPULARITY

REST ON BASIC FACTORS SUGGESTED IN PARA TWO ABOVE, RATHER THAN ON THE SHABA EVENTS THEMSELVES, THAT LEADS ME TO SERIOUSLY DOUBT MOBUTU'S ABILITY TO EFFECT A POLITICAL RECOVERY NO MATTER HOW WELL THE SHABA PROBLEM TURNS OUT.

6 THE PROBLEM WHICH MOBUTU'S GROWING UNPOPULARITY POSES FOR US DIPLOMACY AT A TIME WHEN THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF ZAIRE IS THREATENED IS A DELICATE ONE. IN THE ABSENCE OF A CLEAR INDICATION THAT THE US DRAWS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN SUPPORT OF PRINCIPLES AND SUPPORT FOR MOBUTU' THE PERCEPTION HERE, AND WE PRESUME ABROAD AS WELL, RISKS BEING ONE OF THE US GOVT PROPPING UP A REGIME UNWANTED AND UNSUPPORTED BY THE POPULACE. I BELIEVE IT IS IN OUR OWN SELF-INTEREST TO BEGIN TO DRAW THE DISTINCTION CLEARLY AND I BELIEVE THE PLACE TO START IS IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY.

7. I SPECIFICALLY RECOMMEND THAT THE NEXT TIME THE DEPT PRESS SPOKESMAN IS ASKED TO COMMENT ON OUR SUPPORT FOR MOBUTU, THE SPOKESMAN RESPOND THAT IN SUPPLYING THE MOBUTU GOVT WITH NON-LETHAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE THE US IS SUPPORTING THE PRINCIPLES OF TERR-

ITORIAL INTEGRITY AND NON-INTERFERENCE, THAT THE US HAS HISTORICALLY  
SUPPORT THESE PRINCIPLES NOT ONLY IN AFRICA (E.G. NIGERIA) BUT IN  
OTHER AREAS OF THE WORLD (E.G. YUGOSLAVIA). THE SPOKESMAN SHOULD ALSO  
MAKE THE POINT THAT SUPPORT FOR THESE PRINCIPLES DOES NOT CONNOTE  
SUPPORT FOR A PARTICULAR LEADER BUT RATHER IMPLIES SUPPORT FOR THE  
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RIGHTS OF PEOPLE TO LIVE IN PEACE AND UNITY, FREE FROM OUTSIDE  
INTERFERENCE TO PURSUE THEIR VISION OF A JUST SOCIETY.

8. THE VOICE OF AMERICA COULD THEM PICK UP AND REPORT THE SPOKESMAN'S  
RESPONSE AND FOLLOW UP THE NEWS REPORT WITH AN ANALYSIS. I WOULD  
EXPECT THAT THE SPOKESMAN'S STATEMENT WOULD PRODUCE US PRESS  
SPECULATION TO THE EFFECT THAT THE US HAS CHANGED ITS POLICY AND IS  
PREPARED TO DUMP A CLIENT OF SOME 17 YEARS' STANDING. I RECOMMEND  
THAT WE LIMIT OUR RESPONSE TO REITERATING THAT THERE IS NO POLICY  
CHANGE BUT, RATHER, THAT THE US IS BEING FAITHFUL TO ITS HISTORIC  
TRADITIONS WITH RESPECT TO THE SUPPORT OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND  
NON-INTERFERENCE.

9. BY ESTABLISHING AND ENUNCIATING THESE PRINCIPLES WE WOULD BE  
PLACING A BIT OF DISTANCE BETWEEN US AND THE MAN MOBUTU -- ENOUGH  
SO THAT OUR POSITION WOULD BE BETTER UNDERSTOOD BY THE ZAIRIAN PEOPLE

BUT NOT SO MUCH, I BELIEVE, THAT IT WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO MOBUTU'S  
DOWNFALL OR ELICIT FROM HIM A RASH REACTION AGAINST US. OBVIOUSLY  
THIS WOULD HAVE TO BE HANDLED WITH GREAT CARE AND IN SUCH A WAY THAT  
WE COULD SHIFT BACK OR FORTH DEPENDING ON DEVELOPMENTS. BUT IT WOULD  
BE A BEGINNING ON WHICH -- AGAIN DEPENDING ON DEVELOPMENTS -- WE  
MIGHT WISH TO FOLLOW UP WITH ADDITIONAL STEPS DESIGNED TO UNDERSCORE  
OUR SUPPORT FOR A UNIFIED ZAIRE UNDER A CENTRAL AUTHORITY RATHER  
THAN FOR AN INDIVIDUAL LEADER. TO REPEAT, OUR PURPOSE IS IN NO  
WAY TO BRING DOWN OR EVEN WEAKEN MOBUTU. IT IS, RATHER, AN EFFORT  
TO COVER OUR BETS AND PRESERVE A BASICALLY FAVORABLE ATTITUDE TOWARD  
THE UNITED STATES WHICH PERSISTS ACROSS A BROAD SPECTRUM OF ZAIRIAN  
SOCIETY. AND I BELIEVE THE TIME TO START THIS IS NOW, BEFORE MOBUTU  
DECIDES, AS HE MIGHT WELL DO, TO PUT FOREIGN MERCENARIES IN THE  
FIELD.

10. I HAVE DISCUSSED THE CONTENTS OF THIS MESSAGE WITH MY DCM AND  
MY PAO BUT HAVE NOT SHARED IT WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COUNTRY TEAM.  
HOWEVER, I HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THERE WOULD NOT BE FULL  
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AGREEMENT WITH THE COURSE OF ACTION I RECOMMEND.

CUTLER  
UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER.

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## Message Attributes

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**Sent Date:** 26-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am  
**Decaption Date:** 22 May 2009  
**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 22 May 2009  
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**TAGS:** PFOR, PINS, ECON, MASS, MOPS, CG, US, (MOBUTU SESE SEKO)  
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